

Ms. Meg Greenfield
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

11/12/89

Dear Ms. Greenfield,

Because I made a careful study of some 60,000 pages of FBI records it took more than a difficult and costly decade to get, records that include the period in Dr. King's life about which there is the current controversy, I was indignant over Abernathy's transparent commercialization of it and outraged by Bial's dishonest attack on Raspberry and the Post.

Please excuse the haste in which I have prepared this oped page submission. I hope I've arranged it for easy cutting and, if you want to use it, please feel free to make whatever use you'd like and with whatever changes you want to make.

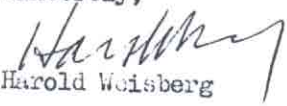
As I believe I told you, I'm not well and my wife, who does my typing for me, also isn't now.

Do not misunderstand my offer of access to those records to Abernathy et al. They and all the other records I've gotten under FOIA have always been available to anyone.

I'm not going to get Abernathy's book now and I've not seen it. Perhaps he has used one of the many things he could have used to refer to King's private life that I enclose. I don't know. Perhaps just seeing it will interest you. It is the letter the FBI sent King in an effort to get him to kill himself. Washington lawyer Lish Whitson flew to Tampa with it and the tape fabricated in the FBI and mailed them from Tampa.

I don't know whether it could interest the Post but I've loaned the inventory of the FBI's field-office holdings I refer to to a college professor friend for him to copy. I've suggested that he write an article about what it means and reflects for use at about the time of King's birthday.

Sincerely,


Harold Weisberg

P.S. I showed that inventory to Dave Garrow before he wrote his Pulitzer book and presume that is how he learned which files had not been sequestered by Judge John Lewis Smith's order. In any event, I'm not aware of any news story ever being written about them.

THE UNKINDEST CUT

Harper & Row's Daniel Bial's condemnation of the Post for William Raspberry's criticism of Ralph Abernathy for including three salacious pages in his book, "And the Walls Came Tumbling Down," is based on irrelevancies, non sequiturs, evasions, circumlocutions and statements of questionable accuracy. Despite these "less than honest" efforts, he validates the criticisms of Raspberry and others, that Harper & Row and Abernathy included those salacious pages for profit - and made it.

Whether or not Raspberry had read the book when he criticized it is not relevant to his criticism, that Abernathy should not have included those salacious pages but did so to increase profits.

"Not to talk about the issue," Bial pontificates, "would have been a whitewash ... and would have been considered less than honest."

The question was not and is not whether "to talk about the issue." It is how.

"The issue," King's well publicized private life, could have been "talked about" with complete honesty in a single paragraph summarizing what the FBI has spent a fortune in taxpayers' money to compile and leak.

It did not require still new allegations the accuracy of which there is good reason to doubt.

I sued the FBI for all its records relating to the King assassination, including all on his fatal trip to Memphis. What Abernathy alleges is what the FBI would have dearly loved to latch onto - had it been there. It isn't.

Bial quotes Raspberry as saying that Abernathy "was talked out of" including those three pages "by an editor for Harper & Row." In feigned refutation, Bial writes that Abernathy "and I discussed the matter and came to a mutual decision." This does not in any way contradict Raspberry. It says only that Abernathy agreed to be talked out of eliminating those three pages

of "sexual revelations" - and that is precisely what Abernathy himself said on coast-to-coast TV. Abernathy stated, in fact, that it was his idea to eliminate them, not Bial's, and that he came to agree with Bial's misrepresentation, that reformulating those pages "would have been a whitewash" and "less than honest."

Raspberry is far from alone in saying that Harper & Row and Abernathy "were pandering to prurient interests." Contrary to Dial's claim, Raspberry did not have to read his mind to say that "the editor knew what Abernathy should have known: that it is the sexual content that will sell the book." This is a publishing norm.

And, predictably, it is what happened, according to Bial himself.

Predictably, those Bial seeks to denigrate by describing the many outraged eminent black leaders and former King associates as "Abernathy's accusers" went public with their complaints and criticisms. That this - also predictably - "became front-page news" is to Bial "only one of the many ironies. ... Another is that while Harper is benefiting from all the publicity, Abernathy is suffering at the maliciousness of his attackers - something we are saddened by."

Saddened all the way to the bank.

This is Bial's admission that titillating the reading public and triggering protests by it guaranteed "all the publicity" that made money for them by commercializing King.

This is precisely what Raspberry and the others who knew and loved King all said the real purpose was.

Stripped of all his circumlocutions, evasions, misrepresentations and other demonstrations of questionable integrity, Bial actually acknowledges the pertinence and accuracy of Raspberry's comments.

Indeed, with all that was already public, whether or not completely

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accurately, on King's private life that Abernathy could have cited - with no criticism of that possible - what purpose other than commercialization and "pandering to prurient interests" to sell books could Abernathy and Harper & Row have had in reporting another alleged sexual escapade?

An alleged escapade I do have substantial reason to question.

Abernathy's account refers to two women. Two women are included in the FBI's reports, but not in any sense as Abernathy writes. They were friends of King's brother, were active in civil rights matters where they lived and were on their way to a Florida vacation when they checked into the Lorraine Motel. The FBI trailed them to Florida and investigated them there. But its Florida reports and those on their stay in Memphis include not even a hint of what Abernathy alleges.

Meetings were held in their motel room and the rooms of others.

This brainstorming certainly was called for. Aside from the bitterness of official Memphis determination not to pay the sanitation workers a living wage or provide safe working conditions or deal with the union; aside from the violence of the week before that so sorely troubled the man of nonviolence; and aside from the hardships worked on the striking workers and their families, when day came - the day King was assassinated - he faced a hearing in federal district court in Memphis on an injunction against his efforts to help the strikers.

Abernathy and King shared a small room in the Lorraine Motel. Certainly Abernathy had to know that those meetings took up much if not most of King's last night alive and what the FBI also reported, the rooms in which they were held and who was present.

The FBI really did have King and the Memphis situation well covered. Among its "symbol informants" were the top leadership of the local NAACP according to FBI records it disclosed to me in which it named them. It had a variety of "sources" throughout the black community who are not classified as

"informants." It had all the results of their extensive spying from the Memphis police.

Its most effective spy, Marrell McCullough, was actually the first person to reach the fallen King. Not Abernathy, who was only a few feet away. McCullough, who rushed up from the parking lot near his car - the car he used to spy on the King party more effectively by providing it with transportation. (He had just returned from driving Reverence James Orange on King business.)

Whatever the merits of Abernathy's book without the sexual content that served no purpose other than the cheapest commercialization, his dependability as a reporter is brought into question by what can fairly be called his effort to commercialize the assassination itself - his claim that the already-dead King spoke his last words to him.

If he or Bial or anyone else at Harper & Row doubt my representation of the content of these FBI records, they are welcome to unlimited access to and copies of them.

If they had cared to learn the extent of the FBI's efforts to ruin King, they'd have seen in these records its inventory of the records its field offices held on him, his family and associates. These inventories do not include a single one of the multitudinous tapes the FBI had made by bugging and phone tapping and they do not include the vastness of what was filed at FBI headquarters. But they still total 402 pages - of just inventory!

ff Small a portion of the books that those three pages are, they did the FBI's dirty work for it.

In all of this the Reverend Abernathy forgot the injunction, let him him who is without sin cast the first stone.

Read the Book, Raspberry

Put 11/11/82

I'm glad that William Raspberry talked with people who read the Rev. Ralph Abernathy's book "And the Walls Came Tumbling Down" and found it an admiring work [oped, Oct. 18]. I'm glad that he quoted Juan Williams, who said it is a good book. But I am outraged that Raspberry would rush to print with a "think piece" without having read the book himself.

Raspberry admits to not having read it, yet he is ready to question its "pandering to prurient interests." He has not talked with Abernathy (I strongly believe), yet he suggests inside information when he says he "was talked out of it by an editor for Harper & Row." And he claims he knew what was going on in my head when he states, "No doubt . . . the editor knew what Abernathy should have known: that it is the sexual revelations that will sell the book." And I know Raspberry never spoke with me.

Raspberry is misinformed on a number of points—and thus he is misinforming. Abernathy did consider deleting those references. He and I discussed the matter and came to a mutual decision. Not to talk about the issue would have been a whitewash; people knew about Martin Luther King Jr.'s extramarital affairs before, and would have considered it less than honest for Abernathy to ignore them. And who would you want to place your imperfect

tions in perspective—a friend or an enemy? Focus on the three pages if you must, Raspberry, but do read them. See how "prurient" they and the rest of the book are.

As for Raspberry's seeing into my mind: he's entirely wrong. At all points, Harper's positioned this book as an important contribution to civil rights history, not as a

salacious tell-all. In none of our pre- or post-publication publicity have we highlighted the sex. Indeed, none of the early reviewers (for the media or in the civil rights movement) picked up on the supposed scandal included in the book. Only when Abernathy's accusers held a press conference, attempting to bury the book and denigrate the Reverend, that the "rev-

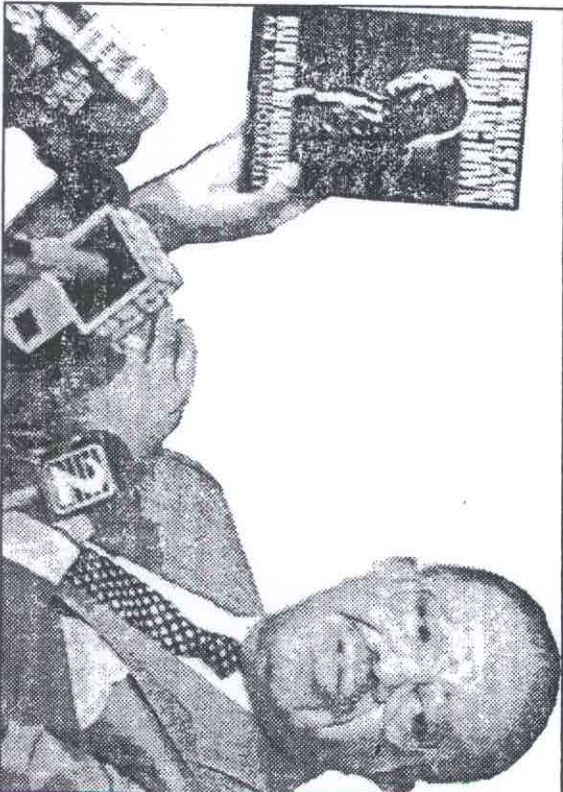
elations" became front-page news. This is only one of the many ironies surrounding the furor of this book. Another is that while Harper is benefiting from all the publicity, Abernathy is suffering at the maliciousness of his attackers—something we are very saddened by.

It is clear that most who have attacked Abernathy, and spread lies about him, have not read the book. I am disappointed in the press for its early picking up of the accusations without checking their veracity. I am doubly disappointed in The Post and in Raspberry for doing the same, at a date when other papers had already started to put the larger question in focus, and whose writers had read the book.

By the time Raspberry's article came out, Earl Caldwell of The New York Daily News had written two pieces. The first was also a report on the controversy; it came before Caldwell read the book. The second came after he read it. While he still had a few reservations, his comments were far more favorable.

I think Raspberry owes readers a fairer article. And he owes it to himself to read the book.

—Daniel Bial
The writer is an editor
at Harper & Row.



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